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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: ZAPORIZHZHYA PRE-ELECTION SNAPSHOT --
FREE CAMPAIGN IN FULL ROAR

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1. (SBU) Summary: In 2004, the abuse of administrative resources by a coordinated "Blue" power "vertikal" and an extra 100,000 dead souls voting in the city of Melitopol delivered 70 percent of Zaporizhzhya oblast to Viktor Yanukovich. In 2006, the absence of administrative pressure from an "Orange" governor allows for a vigorous Rada campaign for parties across the political spectrum. Efforts by the mayor, unaffiliated with any major party, to squelch competitors' mayoral campaigns have been checked by vigorous watchdog action by the local Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU), demonstrating the continued vital role of civil society organizations. Ex-PM Yanukovich's Regions Party is the best-organized party and is headed to at least a 40-percent plurality win, but its oblast leaders remain paranoid about the Orange Revolution and suspicious of the United States. Yuliya Tymoshenko's Bloc (BYuT) has emerged to lay claim to a strong second position; in contrast, President Yushchenko's Our Ukraine is in shambles, in danger of pulling less support than it received in 2002. End summary.

Once Red, then Blue, Zaporizhzhya now in play

2. (SBU) The southeastern industrialized oblast of Zaporizhzhya suffers from Ukraine's worst environmental degradation outside the Chernobyl zone and a track record of shifting electoral loyalties. The Communists scored a 33-percent plurality in the 2002 Rada elections, with SPDU(o) in second (11%) and Our Ukraine third (8%). Backed by heavy administrative pressure in a solid power "vertikal" from district chiefs and mayors to the governor's office to ensure Zaporizhzhya would be solidly "blue" in the 2004 presidential elections, Yanukovich scored a 70-percent return. This included perhaps the single largest incident of so-called voting "dead souls" in the country, according to Zaporizhzhya CVU head Roman Pyatyhorets; the oblast town of Melitopol, population 168,000, ended up with 270,000 names on its voter list, 94 percent of whom voted for Yanukovich.

3. (SBU) In stark contrast, Zaporizhzhya in 2006 is awash in a rainbow of campaign colors from across the political spectrum. The first traffic circle on the road leading from the train station to the center of town sports a double billboard, with an orange Our Ukraine "Tak!" billboard on the left and a red, white, and blue "Ne Tak!" board on the right. Along the squares of the main street, still called Prospekt Lenina (Lenin Avenue), up to a dozen information tents of political polar opposites stand cheek to jowl: the pink and blue Vitrenko People's Opposition next to the white, black and red BYuT; the Red Za Soyuz (For Union with Russia) next to the yellow and blue of Kostenko's Ukrainian People's party; the pink of the Socialists next to the green of Rada Speaker Lytvyn's bloc. The once powerful Communists were nowhere to be seen.

4. (SBU) In similar terms, Zaporizhzhya's four primary industrial enterprises support a range of different parties in 2006; Motor Sich's Vyacheslav Bohuslayev is number 5 on Regions' list; Auto ZAZ' Tarel Vasadze is number 41 on BYuT's list; ZaporizhTransformator's Grigorishin (Russian citizen) has ties to Our Ukraine, and Zaporizhstal contributes to all parties and bankrolls the supposedly unaffiliated incumbent mayor Kartashov.

CVU plays an important role checking local admin abuses

5. (SBU) The Zaporizhzhyan CVU has played a key role in keeping the local playing field level. While local CVU head Pyatyhorets characterized the Rada race as completely free and fair in Zaporizhzhya, he described disturbing tactics and violations in local races. Pyatyhorets has deployed hidden videocams and has made surreptitious phone recordings of violations. This included Zaporizhzhyan incumbent mayor Kartashov, purportedly unaffiliated with any national party, ordering local advertising companies early in the campaign not to give billboard space to his competitors or to national parties other than Lytvyn's bloc; one recording captured Kartashov suggesting the companies tell parties that they would only take commercial clients, or alternatively that all

boards had been booked up.

16. (SBU) Pyatyhorets holds press conferences every few weeks for local Zaporizhzhyan media outlets, providing voter education information and detailing the types of violations uncovered. He told us with pride February 28 that his team had "infiltrated" every major political force and covered developments in the oblast better than any media outlet thanks to "12 years of experience in the election wars." When the city prosecutor's office issued him a threatening summons to produce evidence to back up his charges or face prosecution, he put together a multimedia presentation that left them gasping and pale, "because they realized if they accepted our evidence, they would have to prosecute half the city council," Pyatyhorets related with glee. There were no subsequent problems regarding advertising access, he noted dryly.

Regions in the lead, BYuT Second, Our Ukraine disorganized

17. (SBU) Pyatyhorets and pro-reform weekly Dzerkalo Tyzhnya's Zaporizhzhya correspondent Volodymyr Piskovy told us that Regions was running the best-organized campaign and would score a solid plurality of around 40 percent, though far off Yanukovych's 70-percent return in 2004. Pyatyhorets said that his polling indicated BYuT surging with 24 percent, bolstered by a strong new organization built around the ZAZ leadership. (Note: Piskovy claimed to us that ZAZ owner Vasadze had paid BYuT \$5 million to secure his "guaranteed" Rada seat.) ZAZ deputy director and quietly confident BYuT Campaign Chief Krainy told us that their polls showed BYuT at 16 percent and rising; their target was 25 percent.

18. (SBU) Our Ukraine's effort, led by former governor Artemenko, a Grigorishin ally whom Yushchenko dismissed in September in favor of dismissed Transport Minister and Orange oligarch Chervonenko, was derided by everyone we talked to as hopelessly ineffectual. Our Ukraine likely would receive less than its 2002 eight-percent return. On the positive side, everyone agreed that Chervonenko had played a completely hands-off role, meeting with all visiting party leaders except Tymoshenko, and not exerting any influence on Our Ukraine's behalf. (Note: Chervonenko trumpeted this reality on the March 3 edition of "Svoboda Slova" (Freedom of Speech), effectively countering charges by Regions' national Campaign Chief Kushnaryov that Our Ukraine appointees were exerting pressure in the oblasts on behalf of their party.) But Socialist oblast campaign chief Kuzmenko lamented that Our Ukraine had utterly failed to counter Regions' anti-government propaganda, letting scurrilous charges go unanswered. Kuzmenko said that the Socialists would secure its 5-7-percent target by taking votes away from the Communists, but that he had hoped Our Ukraine would have put in a much better showing to boost overall "Maidan" performance.

Regions still upset about Orange Revolution, U.S. role

19. (SBU) Regions' oblast chief Borys Petrov warily received us after checking with Regions' national headquarters, showing lingering paranoia about the Orange Revolution and suspicions of the U.S. role. Petrov started by referring to a supposed February 26 "admission" by President Bush that the U.S. had funded the Orange Revolution with "\$60 or \$400 million, I forget which." Returning unprompted to the Orange Revolution topic, Petrov thundered: "What happened in Kiev in December 2004 was an overthrow of the constitutional order! What mayhem! I visited the Maidan myself; It was like an army! At least 25 percent of those present were well equipped and clearly had received prior training. I'm not necessarily saying they were trained and equipped from abroad. But where did the money come from?"

10. (SBU) After hearing our explanation of U.S. democracy support programming, focused on institution building not only for groups like the CVU but party training which had trained hundreds of Regions' functionaries, references to the Embassy's frequent meetings with Yanukovych and Akhmetov, our willingness to work with whichever government the Ukrainian people chose, and a discussion about Kiev municipal authorities who used up their annual budget supporting the Khreshchatyk tent city and then failed to clean Kiev's streets of snow in February-March 2005, Petrov and his associates relaxed, finally offering us "welcoming" cups of coffee at the end of the hour-long conversation, rather than at the beginning.

11. (SBU) Petrov said Regions' was determined to "play by the rules" in the 2006 election cycle to avoid charges of election violations. His associate complained, apparently with justification, about administrative resource abuses used by incumbent mayor Kartashov against Regions' mayoral candidate Kaltsev. (Note: In what is widely seen as a close two-horse race, everyone we talked to predicted a Kartashov

victory.) However, both the CVU's Pyatyhorets and journalist Piskovy took issue with the notion that Zaporizhzhya's Regions reps had truly changed, predicting a reversion to past form were they to manage to strike a deal and return to government (reftel).

112. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website at:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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